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Lifetime Achievement: Patrick Scully

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Photos courtesy of Patrick Scully

Patrick Scully needs no introduction. He is, after all, the subject of the 2025 documentary film “The Dance Is Not Over” — a well-deserved accolade in itself, joining many others; the fruits of a life dedicated to art, service and activism.

Scully's life, achievements and perspective are best relayed in his own words.

"I feel honored to receive your award, and at the same time, I want to say that I could never have done it on my own," Scully says. "I've always had a supportive community surrounding me that's made it possible to do what I've done in my lifetime as an artist."

Scully continues: "When I first started performing in the 1970s, there were no places in town that were supportive of out, gay artists embracing their identity in the work that they were creating. I feel like I was born, time-wise, at just the right time to be part of that first generation of post-Stonewall artists who dared to say, 'We're here, we're queer, we're fabulous, get used to us,' and start to create space so that so that a person wouldn't have to worry about, 'Can I show my work if people know that I'm gay, and if my work makes that obvious?'

"That, to me, was part of what I feel like I encountered from my very first years in early adulthood: the importance of coming out, not just to family and friends, but also coming out in the art world to create space so that I didn't have to try to pass, so that I could be myself. And along the way, then gathering with like-minded colleagues and finding support for doing that both within our community and then from allies of our community that supported me not only in the work that I created and put out in the world, but supported me in creating Patrick's Cabaret. And, with the cabaret, creating a venue that supported hundreds, probably even thousands, of artists over the decades that it existed.

"It also made it obvious to me when I learned in 1985 that I was HIV-positive that I needed to go through that same process again of coming out about living with HIV. And, in doing that, creating, again, a kind of space for people to think differently about it, to counter the mainstream narrative, which was telling us at the time, 'You're all gonna die pretty quick anyhow.' And figuring out how to band together with other people to find support, to find alternatives, to challenge the system, so that we could survive. And clearly not all of us did, but some of us have. I feel proud to have been a voice, through being public about my HIV status as an artist, that made it easier for people to live their lives, because I was reflecting a kind of reality back to people that they weren't seeing in lots of places.

Patrick Scully and his partner, Kevin Kortan.

“I almost feel like there wasn’t a choice. I just did what came naturally to me because of how I understood myself and how I felt like I needed to move through the world in order to be true to myself. Because I always thought it’s better to have just a few close friends who really love me for who I am than to be loved by the world for 10% of who I am. If there’s any lesson to be learned, as I look back on it, it’s, there were times when I made choices that I realized that I was sticking my neck out there. But I always felt like, when I’m laid in the ground, I wanna be remembered for having had the courage to live authentically rather than be remembered for having made choices to be comfortable.

“I realize that as a white gay man, there are privileges that I have that make it easier in some ways for me to make those choices, but at the same time, I know in my heart of hearts that I grew up in a world that did not want me to make the choices that I made. … Somehow, though, maybe it’s ‘cause I grew up in the ‘50s and ‘60s, and especially being a child in the ‘60s and that era of examine truth and don’t trust everything you’re told, maybe that helped me to have the courage to to follow the path that I took and make the choices that I made.

“And the other thing that I would add is, as I look at our current political situation, I fear that all of the gains that we’ve made in my lifetime as a community are under threat. But that also points me toward our resiliency. I grew up in a time when none of the rights that we now have existed, and yet we triumphed over that, we came through that, we pushed back and created, and we’re here now. So, my hope is that through the wisdom that we’ve gained in these last 50 years, we will figure out how to overcome the adversity that we currently face and continue to make a better world for us and for everybody that the system would choose to have be invisible.

“It fills my heart to know that, in some ways, having been down the path that I’ve been down has made it easier for other people and has created possibilities for people to do things that didn’t used to exist. That’s a good thing, you know, when we as human beings are living our lives authentically, and as a result, that sort of spreads and gets paid forward and grows and multiplies. That’s deeply satisfying.”

Congratulations to Patrick Scully on an incredible life and career. This award is but a fraction of the recognition his immense impact on the Twin Cities LGBTQ+ community deserves.

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